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INFO RUEHSJ/AMEMBASSY SAN JOSE 5339  
RUEHPE/AMEMBASSY LIMA 7025  
RUEHQ/AMEMBASSY QUITO 7747  
RUEHZP/AMEMBASSY PANAMA 3062

UNCLAS BOGOTA 000612

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SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [EAID](#) [PGOV](#) [AEMR](#) [ASEC](#) [PHUM](#) [KFLO](#) [CO](#)

SUBJECT: SEVERE FLOODING IN TUMACO AND OTHER COMMUNITIES IN NARIO, COLOMBIA: DECLARATION OF DISASTER

**¶1.** SUMMARY: As a result of heavy rains on February 15-16, 2009, the Mira River overflowed its banks causing severe flooding in the municipality of Tumaco, Nario. Over 6,000 families were affected (approximately 31,000 people) resulting in one confirmed death and 22 missing persons. The Chief of Mission has determined that the disaster is of sufficient magnitude to warrant U.S. Government assistance. The damage has exceeded the effective capacity of the Colombian Government to respond, DPAD has indicated they are willing to accept USG assistance, and it is in the best interest of the USG to respond immediately. In addition, USAID has also received requests for assistance from both the municipal government of Tumaco and the departmental government of Nario. The Chief of Mission is therefore exercising his Disaster Assistance Authority. END SUMMARY.

**¶2.** Heavy rains on February 15th in the upper reaches of the Mira River watershed led to a severe flashflood at approximately 4:00 a.m. the following morning in the lower areas of the Mira river - known as 'Bajo Mira' primarily in the municipality of Tumaco, Nario. The flood affected 6,250 families (approximately 31,250 persons - 12,000 of which are children) - including one confirmed death and 22 missing persons. In addition, 1,125 homes have been destroyed by the flooding and over 1,400 other homes were heavily damaged. In addition, approximately 20,000 hectares (49,400 acres) of cash crops (African palm and cacao) and food subsistence crops (yucca, beans, corn, rice and others) are flooded and likely destroyed. The GOC's Disaster Response Agency (known as DPAD - Dirección Nacional para Prevención Atención a Desastres) and the Colombian Red Cross have established 13 shelters that are temporarily sheltering approximately 14,000 people - leaving 17,000 people still residing in the flooded communities. The rains have continued intermittently through since February 15.

**¶3.** The Municipality of Tumaco declared a state of emergency on February 16th and put its emergency contingency plan into action. The response to the crisis thus far has been focused in three areas: evacuation, establishment of temporary shelters and the distribution of humanitarian assistance both to the shelters as well as to the flooded riverine communities. The GOC (DPAD, Civil Defense forces and support of Colombian and USG-financed military assets such as helicopters, planes and boats) led the evacuation. The Colombian Air Force has established an air bridge for delivery of relief supplies from Bogota. DPAD, and the Colombian Red Cross, along with UN OCHA and support from the municipality have led the establishment of temporary shelters and delivery of humanitarian assistance.

**¶4.** Embassy Bogota has already contributed assistance to the relief effort through several U.S. MILGRP minimal cost projects, totaling \$7,000, used primarily to purchase blankets and other non-food humanitarian relief supplies. U.S. MILGRP also donated needed medicines and medical supplies, totaling \$10,000, which were delivered Saturday (2/21/09) to the Colombian Red Cross in Tumaco.

Plan Colombia-financed (NAS) air assets and air time played a crucial role in the evacuation efforts, as well as in the delivery of humanitarian relief supplies.

¶15. According to the most recent surveys of affected communities in the flooded areas, the greatest need continues to be potable water and sanitation. 63 veredas (townships or rural subsections of a municipality) were fully flooded and the most are still without electricity. Six rural water systems within these veredas were also destroyed. The municipal water system for the urban area of Tumaco was severely damaged and the water contaminated. Municipal water service was turned back on in the urban area of Tumaco on February ¶23. However, service is provided only for two hours a day. As the flood waters recede, water and sanitation needs and the ensuing public health concerns will continue to be problematic in the coming months. Furthermore, due to the flooded crops, when combined with the collapse of the financial pyramid schemes in the fall of 2008, the food security situation will become problematic in the coming months for the residents of Tumaco and other coastal municipalities of Nario.

¶16. The COM authority of \$50,000 will be used to address the immediate needs for potable water and sanitation as well as to purchase and transport non-food humanitarian relief supplies, such as hygiene and kitchen kits, mattresses and blankets, destined for the worst hit areas of Tumaco and other coastal municipalities of Nario. OFDA/LAC is recommending an additional \$50,000 for a total of \$100,000. The relief assistance is likely to be channeled through the Colombian Red Cross. In addition USAID/Colombia is also considering reprogramming up to an additional \$30,000 of IDP funds, based on continued need, through existing USAID grants. Existing USAID partners in the area, along with input from the MDRO, are looking at means to address medium-term food security concerns

through existing grants and contracts.

¶17. The GOC's Ministry of Interior and Justice issued a National Disaster Declaration for the Municipality of Tumaco on February 23, ¶2009.

¶18. Additional funds and relief supplies may be requested based on humanitarian gaps identified by the OFDA Regional Advisors and the MDRO.

¶19. For additional and ongoing information on the Tumaco floods please see the following websites:

- GOC/DPAD - <http://www.sigpad.gov.co/>
- The Colombian Red Cross <http://www.cruzrojacolombiana.org>
- UN/OCHA Colombia office <http://www.colombiassh.org>

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